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Visual Search Future Mapped by MetaCarta

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MetaCarta announced the release of GeoIntel for Petroleum, a vertical geographic search engine intended for the energy industry. This type of search technology is a good model for many other types of future search systems.

Important Details: MetaCarta, a geographic and text search service which allows one to find content about a place and view the results on a map, recently announced the release of GeoIntel for Petroleum. GeoIntel for Petroleum is a vertical geographic search engine intended for the energy industry, and consists of thousands of open source documents and web sites which are linked to from the GeoIntel search. The site provides a simple search box with the option to enter a geographic location - a search can be initiated from either or both areas. Results are presented in a split-screen format with text on the left and a map on the right. Manipulations on either side of the screen affect the other, and a search can be narrowed and refined through manipulation of the map.

Implications: A simple description of MetaCarta's software, which is in use by the large energy companies and many government agencies, does not really convey the power of the visual, geographic element added to a search - as with Google Earth, you have to experience a few examples to get it - and then the mind races with extrapolations to a wide variety of circumstances. GeoIntel is intended to be demonstrated like this, and when it is it shows the interplay between text and geographic search and the various ways in which the map can be used to manipulate and refine a search in which a geographical element is important. Certainly something as simple as seeing international news with an immediate visual orientation to where an event is occurring would expand our understanding of the world.

But the remarkable thing is not the application so much as the concept that textual ideas are made concrete in a graphical format, which can then be manipulated to fine tune the text search. Whether you imagine a huge multinational corporation managing teams by a combination of personnel files and office locations, or a physician working through evidence by manipulating an atlas of a body, perhaps along with dragging and dropping procedures or medications, the idea of using concrete, immediately understandable visual elements to move efficiently through text is immensely appealing and adds a dimension to the search experience which resembles gaming and fun. Its hard to believe that the long-term future for many kinds of search won't be oriented towards such a technology.

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